

**BLESSED IS THE NATION
PSALM 33**

(Called to Dedicated Public Service and Prophetic Witness)

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Good evening to everyone but especially those in the government service both past and present.

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom He has chosen as his heritage.”

We gather today to give thanks to God for the change of administration in the governance of our beloved country. The people have spoken and have elected our country’s leaders and our President, Rodrigo Roa Duterte has formed the Cabinet.

We gather today to express our gratitude for men and women our President appointed in his official family who came from our ranks and those who have been associated with us. We gather today more importantly to pledge ourselves to pray for them and the rest in government that they commit themselves to dedicated public service and to uphold and stand by the principle that “sovereignty resides in the people and all government authority emanates from them” (Art II Sec 1) and that “the prime duty of the Government is to serve and protect the people.” (Art II Sec 4) 1987 Phil. Constitution.

In this we stand as a Church and as patriotic citizens of the land in prophetic witness even as we assert with the President while there is separation of the Church and State (Art II Sec 6), there is never now and ever will be a separation between God and the State. It is in this arena that we will do our prophetic witness.

The Psalmist declares: “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord...” (Ps 33:12). What makes a nation blessed? Where does the blessedness of a nation lie?

They say that something can be defined by describing what it is and what it is not. May I start by describing what it is not.

- The blessedness of a nation does not lie on its national agenda, its national ideology or national ambitions.

In the Bible, the start of the nations did not seem to have taken off from a good start. After the Great Flood, the people were still one big family or clan and spoke just one language - but there came the time when the population grew and they spoke to one another saying: “Let’s build a city with a tower that reaches to the sky, so that we can make a name for ourselves” (Gen 11:4).

This was not just putting up a huge, tall structure but a symbol of wanting to be godlike - to become architects and masters of their own destiny. The phrase, “to make a name for ourselves” is in fact a defiance to the authority of God, as the giving of names means that the one giving the name has authority and power over the one given the name.

You see this happening in many places in the Scripture. For instance, when God stated to human beings, “Have dominion over all creation,” what was one of the very first things that Adam did? To name the animals and the birds. That was an exercise of authority and dominion. Another example, when the king of Babylon took in exile the best and the brightest youth of Israel to teach them the ways of the Chaldeans, (reminds me of the same manner as the USA took the likes of Quezon, Osmena and Roxas), Daniel 1:6-7 says that “among them were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, Then the commander of the officials assigned **new names** to them; and to Daniel he assigned the name Beltheshazar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach, and to Azariah Abednego.”

So that when the people began to say, "Let us make a name for ourselves", they were in effect saying to God, "We no longer recognize your authority over us."

The act of God to separate them was an act to frustrate their plans. Out of these separated people, speaking in different tongues, became the forerunners of the nations.

Since then and up to now, many nations have arisen to go against the will of God. Charlemagne had his "Holy Roman Empire", Hitler had a dream of a super Aryan race, Japan has its "Great East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere," America had its "Manifest Destiny", etc, etc, etc - nations pushing their national interests and agenda - many with beautiful rationalization like the "White Man's Burden" of America - but aimed at "making a name for themselves", at the expense of other nations and peoples. Is this where a nation's blessedness lie - in the conquest and in the colonization of, and in the imperialist control over others?

Our text in verse 10 declares: "The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations; God frustrates the plans of the peoples."

- The blessedness of a nation does not lie on its national agenda, its national ideology or national ambitions. Nor does its blessedness lie on its military might.

Verses 16 and 17 states: "The king is not saved by a mighty army; A warrior is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a false hope for victory; Nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength." Not by its armed forces, not by its soldier's might, not by its war materials.

Not in or for the Philippines, if you compare it to the superpowers flexing their power in our backyard. Horses in v. 17 means the war machinery or military power. So like in Isaiah, God said to Israel: "Do not trust in the horses of Egypt," what it means is that they are not to put trust in the mutual defense treaty with Egypt. Egypt with her own national interests will abandon you when Assyria and Babylon will make their play against you.

The blessedness of a nation does not lie on its military might or on its military alliances.

If the blessedness of a nation does not lie in its national ideology and agenda nor does it lie on its military might and alliances, where then does it lie?

- The blessedness of a nation lies not in itself but in God. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD. Blessed are the people whom God has chosen.

Do you still remember the covenant God made with Abraham? This is repeated several times in Genesis but let me read one of its versions. In Genesis 18:18-19 we see: "... Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him **to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice**, so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."

What is needed for them to obtain what the Lord has promised? For them to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. Righteousness and justice are different sides of the same coin. The two always go together. One without the other is incomplete. In fact, in Greek, the word just and righteous are interchangeable. It is just one word - "dikaios."

According to the footnote in the NIV Study Bible on Psalm 72, the "ideal concept" of government is founded upon the "sacred virtues" of "justice and righteousness."

So if we claim to be a blessed and a godly nation, we must be a nation that is characterized with justice and righteousness; we must be a people who love, who advocate, who struggle for justice and righteousness.

Do these, be these - and God said He will fulfill what He has promised in His covenant.

According to our text, what blessings did God promise to a nation whose God is the Lord?

- Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, why? Because God watches over it - verse 18.

I am reminded of how God watches over us in a familiar song - God's Eye is on the Sparrow: "I sing because I am happy; I sing because I'm free; cause God's eye is on the sparrow and I know God watches me." As that can be spoken of the sparrow and to a person trusting God, so can it be said of a nation blessed by God.

There is a beautiful passage in Ezekiel talking about the restoration of a nation with God using the image of a watchful and caring Shepherd:

"As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day.

I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land.

I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord God. "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick..." (Ezek 34:12-16)

Blessed is a nation who has a God like that.

- Second, blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, why? Because God saves them and supplies their needs.

Verse 19 declares that God delivers their soul from death and keep them alive in times of famine. So that in the next psalm (Psalm 34 in verse 10) we find the Psalmist saying, "The young lions do lack and suffer hunger;" You see the analogy here, the young lion cubs - children of the mighty king of the jungle, yet at times his cubs lack food. The Psalmist went on to say: "But they who seek the Lord shall lack nothing that is good." It is not that they do not lack anything but that they do not lack anything the is good.

- Thirdly, blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, why? Because God protects and helps (v. 20). When God warns the nations not to trust in the power and might of other nations, God is not saying that they should stand alone but for the nations to realise that they can stand with God.

When the Remnant Community started to rebuild the nation of Israel by first re-establishing the Temple, what was the promise to Zerubbabel in Zechariah 4:6? You will succeed, "not by might, nor by power but by My Spirit, says the Lord". Not by military might, not by your own strength - that is the meaning. But by God's Spirit.

At many times, nations especially those going to war would say, "God is on our side." It is important for them to justify their war efforts by invoking that God is blessing them. But as someone wisely observed, "the question is not so much whether God is on our side. The more important question is: "Who is on the Lord's side? Are we on the Lord's side?"

A nation that is on the Lord's side, a nation that is blessed by God has hope. Hope that God will see us through. Hope that will make us hold on persevere. Hope that says, "No matter how dark and how dreary our situation may be, right now and right here we declare, God is faithful and true, God will deliver on His promise." As the President quoted, "It is when the night is at its darkest that dawn comes."

Those of you in governance may find the task daunting, the obstacles many, the opposition great - but as you commit yourselves to dedicated public service; as you recognize that you are rendering this service for our people and in the name and in the will of God, we pray that you may find strength in the Lord equal to your task. We pray that you may find strength in the words of a hymn:

Fierce may be the conflict, strong may be the foe
But the King's own army, none can overthrow
'Round His standard ranging, victory is secured
For His truth unchanging make His triumph sure
Joyfully enlisting, by Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side; Savior, we are thine

(Frances Havergal's "We are on the Lord's side")

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. May our prayer be that of the end of Psalm 33:

Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him,
On those who hope for His lovingkindness...

O Lord, our soul waits for You;
You are our help and our shield.
Our hearts rejoice in You,
Because we trust in Your holy name.
Let Your lovingkindness, O Lord, be upon us,
Even as we have hoped in You. Amen

(Ps . 33: 18-22 modified)